

Prepared Statement of Ranking Member Richard Burr
Nomination of Mayor Martin Walsh, U.S. Secretary of Labor

February 4, 2021

Good morning, Chair Murray. Thank you for scheduling this hearing to consider the nomination of Mayor Marty Walsh to be the Secretary of Labor.

Mayor Walsh, welcome. You've been a mayor, a state representative, and a union leader. You have the experience and qualifications to be considered for this position.

I congratulate you on your nomination.

The Department of Labor serves an immensely important role in our economy and in the lives of American workers.

Our nation can never afford to have a Labor Secretary that will ever be accused of being in cahoots with union bosses or beholden just to management. This is a job that requires a Labor Secretary who is willing to make a commitment to confront both, when necessary, for the protection of rank-and-file individual workers.

Especially in the midst of a pandemic with unemployment of 6.7 percent and 12.6 million people unemployed, this is a job that needs filling. That is why I agreed with Sen. Murray to begin the processing of your nomination – as soon as institutionally possible – without unnecessary delays and roadblocks.

Not all nominees in other circumstances – in other Administrations – have received that consideration. You will get that consideration from me. I don't know if you would consider this the biggest job interview of your life but my guess is it's up there. The President has nominated you -- and the Senate now has the opportunity to give its advice and consent.

I'm going to commit to giving you my best advice today. And my best well intentioned advice in the days ahead should you be confirmed by the Senate. I hope you can commit to doing the job the right way.

The people who work in Washington D.C. need to come in to serve all Americans. From coast to coast and in the middle. Democrats and Republicans. Management and labor. No matter what pressure comes from the extremes of the President's party, we cannot open the doors of the Labor Department up to people who want to make enemies of job creators. And the Department's job is not to make trial lawyers richer at a time when many businesses are struggling to keep their doors open for the benefit of their workers. The problem with slaughtering the golden goose is that you no longer get the eggs.

America is in the midst of immense domestic and international challenges. We have health challenges with the coronavirus pandemic. We have challenges with international competition with China and others.

We should be able to work together to address these challenges.

We need a skilled workforce. We need to encourage more women and minorities into science technology engineering and math. We need to ensure that management and labor never conspire to construct another unfunded pension plan. We need to ensure America that government is here to assist – not hinder – the reopening of our economy. The list goes on.

Bipartisan solutions exist to all of these problems, and if you commit to working together in a bipartisan manner with us, I'm sure that the Senate will work with you.

I am particularly concerned about the unprecedented firing of the NLRB's general counsel. No president has ever taken such an action in recent memory, not Trump, Obama, Bush, Clinton, Bush, Reagan, or others before them, and that is a disturbing signal from an Administration preaching the need for bipartisan unity.

I would caution you and the Administration that might doesn't always make right and that you should be mindful that lurches to the left will be bad for growing our economy and getting people back to work.

At one point in our history, the Department of Labor and the Department of Commerce existed together. Theodore Roosevelt knew that the interests of commerce and labor were ultimately aligned. Somehow, over the years, we have lost our way in that regard.

Our largest economic challenges are external. As the Chairman of the Intelligence Committee, I learned that our competitors are not playing fair. We need to be on the same team. We need to battle for our economy and for our fellow citizens not for a philosophy.

Samuel Gompers, the founder of the American Federation of Labor, once said that a man who dwells on socialism forgets his union card. He told his socialist opponents, “Economically, you are unsound; socially you are wrong; industrially you are an impossibility.”

These sorts of unsound impossible political agendas he spoke of don’t help the working person. They present the biggest standing threat to America’s competitiveness. I implore you: do not be a party to it. As Teamsters General President Jim Hoffa pointed out, the political decision by President Biden to cancel the completion of construction of the Keystone XL Pipeline, resulted in the loss of at least 8,000 union jobs and the loss of members' retirement and health benefits. I hope that when confirmed you will be an adult voice in the room reigning in this type of politically motivated chaos. Chaos in that specific example which cuts jobs and counter-productively *increases* greenhouse gas emissions.

I hope you can help us move beyond a class struggle mentality of 100 years ago and help us build a workforce for 2021 and beyond. We can no longer afford to operate as a labor team and a management team. We must be in this together.

Tom Brady has proven that a Massachusetts guy can hop on I-95 South and do some good things. If doing good is your goal -- and I think it is your goal -- you'll have an ally in me. But you've got to be willing to stand up to the agenda activists to get to that goal.

I plan to conduct rigorous oversight, especially of the response to COVID-19, and will ask fair, but difficult and probing questions on the decisions you make and the way the agency operates. I will expect honest, complete, and timely answers. I hope you can commit to working with me on that.

I expect by the end of this hearing I will be able to support your nomination and encourage my colleagues to support you as well and I look forward to working with you.

Thank you.